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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000567

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SUBJECT: TURKEY/IRAQ: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH MFA IRAQ
COORDINATOR CELIKKOL

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Turkish Foreign Ministry Special Representative for Iraq Oguz Celikkol told Ambassador February 7 that maintaining Iraq's unity is essential not only for Turkey but for the balance of power in the entire Middle East. Turkey is concerned an independent Sunni statelet would be a magnet for terrorism, while a Shi'a entity would be dominated by Iran. The Ambassador told Celikkol the U.S. appreciated Turkey's efforts to keep the Sunnis on board before the December elections; the Turks should coordinate closely with our embassy in Baghdad to see where further such initiatives might be useful. He told Celikkol a high level GOT visit to Baghdad and an early invitation to the new Iraqi leadership to visit Turkey would be welcome steps, and Celikkol agreed. The Ambassador urged Turkey to exploit its considerable economic and political leverage over northern Iraq and move forward on opening additional border gates, and praised Turkey's willingness to share with Iraq its recent experience with Avian Influenza.

¶2. (C) Celikkol listed key Turkish concerns:

- the distribution of key ministries in new Iraqi government will be critical, and the Sunnis must get a fair share.
- the current Iraqi constitution does not give central government sufficient authority and should be amended.
- the Kurds are doing nothing to counter PKK in northern Iraq; Barzani is using the PKK as a card against Turkey.
- the 2007 referendum on Kirkuk should be delayed until the next Iraqi Assembly is elected to ensure this divisive issue does not inflame sectarian/ethnic tensions.
- GOT is waiting to hear from Iraq on a "package deal" for opening additional border crossings, but Barzani appears to be blocking this.

Celikkol is planning to travel to Baghdad and northern Iraq the week of February 20 and hopes to meet Ambassador Khalilzad. The GOT may approach Embassy Baghdad for security

advice related to Celikkol's travel. End Summary

Iraq Key to Middle East Balance

13. (C) Celikkol stressed the importance of a unified Iraq for stability in the Middle East. With Iranian influence growing in both Iraq and Syria, the GOT believes that a politically fragmented Iraq would be inherently unstable and would upset the political balance in the region. A separate Shi'a state in Iraq would be a magnet for Iranian influence, while a Sunni statelet could easily become a haven for terrorists like Afghanistan before September 11, 2001. This is alarming the Gulf states, Celikkol stated. Turkey shares the U.S. desire for a broadly inclusive Iraqi government where Sunnis are guaranteed effective participation. The balanced distribution of key ministries, particularly those dealing with security, will be crucial. Celikkol was critical of the Iraqi constitution, which he believes gives insufficient power to the central government in the economic and security areas, suggesting it be amended early.

Two Overriding Concerns: PKK and Kirkuk

14. (C) Reiterating points he made during his recent visit to Washington, Celikkol complained that the Iraqi Kurds, and the KDP under Barzani in particular, are doing nothing to constrain the PKK but are instead using the terrorist group as leverage against Turkey. Celikkol warned that Turkey's neighbors (read Syria and Iran), had tried this in the past

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and failed. The GOT is convinced Barzani could easily arrest key PKK figures roaming northern Iraq and constrain the movement of terrorists. Instead, PKK presence is increasing and, Celikkol observed, this will become a threat to Barzani as well. The Kurds have gained a lot in northern Iraq, including a booming economy, Celikkol noted, but must be told "where the line is."

15. (C) Celikkol said a fair resolution of the status of Kirkuk is essential to Iraq's future. He noted that the Kurdish and Turkmen/Arab populations are roughly equal in Kirkuk, but Kurds continue to try to change the demographics there. The GOT believes the referendum on Kirkuk's status, scheduled for 2007, should be delayed until a new Assembly is elected, whereupon a special status for Kirkuk could be decided in a way that reflects consensus and avoids inflaming this divisive issue. The Arabs and Turkmen will not tolerate further Kurdish attempts to change the reality on the ground there, he warned, stating that the U.S. is the only force that can convince the Kurds to back off.

16. (C) The Ambassador responded that the USG is aware of Turkey's concerns regarding the PKK and Kirkuk and agreed the PKK is a threat not only to Barzani but to long-term stability in Iraq. He said the U.S. had approached Barzani on the issue, but urged the Turkish side to stay in close contact with U.S. officials in Iraq as well.

Early Engagement with new Iraqi Government

17. (C) Recalling that interim Iraqi Prime Minister Jafari's first foreign visit was to Turkey, the Ambassador encouraged the GOT to consider a high-level visit to Iraq once the new government is installed and to invite senior Iraqi officials to Turkey. Celikkol confirmed he is planning to travel to Baghdad and northern Iraq the week of February 20 to advance a prospective visit by Foreign Minister Gul, and hopes to be able to meet with Ambassador Khalilzad. PM Erdogan is open to inviting the new Iraqi Prime Minister as well. Celikkol

added that Turkey is prepared to assist our efforts in Iraq in any way possible, including by hosting additional meetings of U.S. and Iraqi political leaders in Turkey similar to the pre-election meeting the GOT hosted with Sunni leaders in Istanbul. The Ambassador expressed appreciation for this and urged Turkey to raise this with our embassy in Baghdad.

¶18. (C) Celikkol confirmed the GOT has informed Baghdad of its willingness to send a team to Iraq to share Turkish experience with its recent Avian Influenza outbreak and is awaiting an Iraqi government response with Iraq's specific needs. (Comment. The GOT's handling of the January outbreak has been widely praised by U.S. and international health experts. End comment). The Ambassador praised the Turkish initiative as but one example of the many areas where Turkey could be helpful to Iraq.

Northern Iraq and Border Issues

¶19. (C) Noting that Turkey has growing political and economic leverage in northern Iraq, the Ambassador urged Celikkol to see where its considerable influence can be put to good use, including in the opening of additional border gates to relieve the pressure on the single Habur Gate. Celikkol described the "package deal" on opening additional gates the GOT had discussed with Iraqi Development Minister Barham Salih last September and stated that Turkey is still waiting for a response from Baghdad endorsing the idea. Celikkol accused Barzani of blocking movement forward. He said that, for a deal to work, Iraq would have to agree to a set date for opening of the Ovakoy border crossing preferred by Turkey, but this could be one of several new crossing points opened in a phased manner. Once the GOT receives a positive signal in this regard, it is ready to move ahead. The Ambassador urged Celikkol to continue to seek ways to break the deadlock. He told Celikkol the U.S. is pleased Turkey is establishing a consulate in Mosul and would be prepared to assist, as appropriate. The U.S. is also trying

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to help Iraq and Turkey find a durable solution to the problem of SOMO arrears and fuel shipments.

Public Diplomacy

¶10. (C) Celikkol reported that he and Prime Ministry advisor Davutoglu had met with representatives of the Turkish press on February 3 to describe Turkey's efforts in Iraq. Both had stressed to the press that Turkey and the U.S. are working closely for positive outcomes in Iraq and regretted that the just-released Turkish film "Valley of the Wolves - Iraq," depicting fictional American atrocities in Iraq, sends an unfortunate message to the public at a time when Turkish and U.S. goals for Iraq are closely aligned. Celikkol said the MFA would seek to do more to publicize U.S. - Turkish efforts in a positive light. The Ambassador promised continued close coordination and information sharing. Post notes that, in the wake of this February 3 meeting, several editorials appeared in the Turkish press waxing positive on U.S. - Turkish relations and lamenting the extremely negative images conveyed by "Valley of the Wolves."

Comment

¶11. (C) We greatly appreciate Mission Iraq's close coordination with the Turkish embassy in Baghdad and its assistance with Turkish efforts to set up a consulate in Mosul. We encourage Mission Iraq to use Celikkol's visit to engage him on areas where Turkey can help us further our common goals in Iraq.

